

Study: 15 percent of US youth out of school, work

Study: Nearly 6M youth out of school or work, likely locked into limited prospects as adults

By Philip Elliott

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<http://news.yahoo.com/study-15-percent-us-youth-040402321.html>



FILE - In this March 14, 2013, file photo, a crowd of job seekers attends a health care job fair in New York. Almost 6 million young people, ages 16 to 24, are neither in school nor working, according to a study released Monday, Oct. 21, 2013, by The Opportunity Nation coalition. The study also finds that 49 states have seen an increase in the number of families living in poverty and 45 states have seen household median incomes fall in the last year. The report underscores the challenges young adults face now and foretell challenges they are likely to face as they get older. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Almost 6 million young people are neither in school nor working, according to a study released Monday.

That's almost 15 percent of those aged 16 to 24 who have neither desk nor job, according to The Opportunity Nation coalition, which wrote the report.

Other studies have shown that idle young adults are missing out on a window to build skills they will need later in life or use the knowledge they acquired in college. Without those experiences, they are less likely to command higher salaries and more likely to be an economic drain on their communities.

"This is not a group that we can write off. They just need a chance," said Mark Edwards, executive director of the coalition of businesses, advocacy groups, policy experts and nonprofit organizations dedicated to increasing economic mobility. "The tendency is to see them as lost souls and see them as unsavable. They are not."

But changing the dynamic is not going to be easy.

The coalition also finds that 49 states have seen an increase in the number of families living in poverty and 45 states have seen household median incomes fall in the last year. The dour report underscores the challenges young adults face now and foretell challenges they are likely to face as they get older.

A young person's community is often closely tied to his or her success. The Opportunity Nation report tracked 16 factors — Internet access, college graduation rates, income inequality and public safety among them — and identified states that were doing well for its young people.

Topping the list of supportive states are Vermont, Minnesota and North Dakota. At the bottom? Nevada, Mississippi and New Mexico.

"Their destiny is too often determined by their ZIP code," said Charlie Mangiardi, who works with Year Up, a nonprofit that trains young adults for careers and helps them find jobs.

"We have the supply. We don't have a lack of young people who need this opportunity," Mangiardi added.

Just look at some of the nation's largest cities. Chicago, Houston, Dallas, Miami, Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Riverside, Calif., all have more than 100,000 idle youth, the Opportunity Nation report found.

"Often times they lack the social capital in life," Mangiardi said. "There's a whole pool of talent that is motivated, loyal and hardworking." They just can't get through an employer's door, he added.

That's why Year Up spends a year working with high school graduates to teach them career skills such as computer programming or equipment repair they can use when the program ends. It also includes life coaching so they can learn skills such as time management. More than 4,500 young adults from urban areas have completed the program and 84 percent of them have found work.

But it's a far tougher time for other young people.

In Mississippi and West Virginia, 1 in 5 young people are idle — higher than their older neighbors. Mississippi has an overall unemployment rate of 8 percent, while West Virginia posts about 7 percent. Like most states, they saw their unemployment rate fall since 2011, but researchers caution that shift could come from fewer residents looking for work and from more who had simply given up their search for jobs.

And it's not as though the challenges emerge from nowhere. Quality early childhood programs help students from poor families overcome societal hurdles, and on-time high school graduation rates often follow quality schools — other factors Opportunity Nation examined in its report.

"A lot of times we don't want to look at data because we don't want to be depressed," said Rob Denson, president of Des Moines Area Community College in Iowa.

But it's an uncomfortable reality that needs to be addressed, he said.

Using previous years' reports from Opportunity Nation, Denson helped rally community organizations in his city to develop a pilot program to help students as young as 14 find summer work.

"When we got the index, it really allowed us to use it as a rallying point for all of the community-based organizations we work with to say, 'Look, this is what the world sees when they look at Iowa,'" he said.

Starting next summer, Des Moines students will be placed in paying jobs, part of a citywide collaboration to help its urban communities. It will help older adults, as well, because crime rates are expected to fall, he said.

"If they're not in school or at work," Denson said, "they're not usually doing something positive."

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